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LICENSED VETERINARY TECHNICIAN

CHANGE is on
the HORIZON



UPDATES ON A FEW NEIGHBORLY ISSUES



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When you have Mexico as a neighbor, it allows you to routinely come into contact with great people, great food and great tequila if you want to. But from an animal health perspective, being a neighbor to Mexico means one more thing—job security. Here is an update on some of the current issues related to Mexico that the livestock, poultry and cervid industries of Texas are facing.

We continue to find livestock from Mexico not only straying onto the Texas side of the border but also actually living here without the permission of the Texas landowners. As of my deadline for this article, there are two separate herds of cattle that the Texas Animal Health Commission (TAHC) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) are preparing to capture on the Texas side of the Rio Grande. Mexican cattle still have tuberculosis (TB) and brucellosis as well as babesiosis and a number of other diseases and parasites foreign to Texas. The same situation is true for Mexican horses as well, and just recently, Border Patrol agents captured four more horses being smuggled into Texas south of El Paso that were all infected with Equine Piroplasmiasis (Piro).

Speaking of Piro, TAHC has now finished its second countywide test, this time in Kleberg County (Kingsville). The first county tested was Kennedy. After testing almost 1,000 horses, a total of 19 were found to be infected. The horses were located on six different premises. The question now is “Where do we go next?” TAHC epidemiologists will be working with the horse industry in South Texas and practicing veterinarians down there to determine the next move later this fall. We believe this Piro is related to “hot” tick-infested pastures rather than dirty needles, as is the case in the racing industry. Since the tick species involved doesn’t pass Piro on to future generations, once we find the positive horses and remove or treat them, the pastures

will regain their negative status within a year, when all the ticks die.

The Piro in our Quarter Horse racing industry continues to be found, and TAHC will continue to work with that industry to diminish the incidence statewide. The good news is that the treatment with imidocarb seems to be effective, so there is now another viable option besides euthanasia or permanent quarantine. One sidenote is that we now know that some of these horses are dually infected with equine infectious anemia (EIA). It only makes sense as both diseases are endemic in Mexico. So when you see a horse with any kind of hemolytic crisis and especially with a background of racing or a connection to Mexico, don’t just consider Piro in your diagnostic work-up but consider EIA as well. We recently found a dual-infected horse, as did California.

Mexico continues to fight an avian influenza (AI) outbreak in the central part of the country. To date, the highly pathogenic H7N3 strain of AI has resulted in the loss of more than 24 million laying hens alone and has also had a huge impact on the broiler industry. Many of the major poultry industries in the U.S. have operations in Mexico, and they are on high-alert with their biosecurity measures. The TAHC stands guard as well in evaluating backyard flocks for disease and partnering with inspections along the border. Practitioners treating sick birds that may have had any possible connection with Mexico should keep this disease in mind. It would have a dire economic impact on the U.S. industry from both a bird loss and trade perspective if it were brought into this country.

We are excited about the progress with the number of fever tick-infested premises. There are currently fewer than 30 quarantined ranches along the Rio Grande versus 165 herds five years ago. We know it is only a matter of time, however, until the ticks come back. They are continually introduced through stray livestock and wild animals, such as deer

or nilgai. In the meantime, TAHC has partnered with the USDA, the cattle industry, private drug companies and other organizations to come up with new tools to fight the ticks. We expect a tick vaccine to be ready by February, and TAHC and the USDA will provide it at no cost to ranchers in the quarantine zone. The USDA has proposed to build a deer-proof fence along the same 500-mile stretch of the river to keep Mexican deer out. Finally, we already are using, under special permit, Ivermectin-treated molasses tubs, so the cattle down there can treat themselves for ticks 24/7.

It had been hoped that the stream of slaughter horses crossing Texas on the way to Mexico might be diverted if a U.S. horse slaughter plant opened up in another state, but with all the legal wrangling going on, that may never happen. In the meantime, we continue to monitor the “rejects” that Mexican officials refuse to allow to enter Mexico at our Texas export facilities. They need to either go back to the state they came from or meet all the Texas-entry health requirements. This is a never-ending job, and there is often no logic to which horses the Mexican border inspectors will allow in or reject.

Currently, all Mexican cattle imports are being inspected for ticks and compliance with other entry requirements on the Texas side of the border at five different locations due to violence down there. TAHC and USDA staff partner to ensure these animals are safe to enter and that any risk is properly mitigated before they mix with the general animal population of Texas. There also are now two ports open at Laredo and Nuevo Leon that can inspect horses trying to enter Texas by land.

So as you can see, business is steady along the Mexican border. If anyone would like to visit a border port, give me a call, and I will hook you up. As always, TAHC is here to help keep our animal health population safe in Texas, and our No. 1 partner is you, the veterinary practitioner. **TV**